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① B.A.-III Hons.

Stream of Consciousness (A literary Essay)

One of the most important developments in the technique of the modern novel is the Stream of Consciousness. The phrase "Stream of Consciousness" was first used by William James in Principles of Psychology to denote the chaotic flow of impressions and sensations through human consciousness. This particular kind of novel is also called the subjective novel or the psychological novel. The purpose of this type of novel is, according to Katherine Gerould, "to portray life and character by setting down everything that goes on in the hero's mind, notably all those ~~is~~ all ~~reoccurring~~ those unimportant and chaotic though sequences which occupy our idle and somnolent moments, and to which, in real life, we pay ourselves, little attention".

The Stream of Consciousness technique was influenced by the Symbolism of French poets and the novelist, Marcel Proust, by the new researches in psychological novelist's aimed at not presenting human character in the traditional sense. They realised that a psychologically accurate account of what a man is at any given moment can be given neither in terms of a static description of his character nor in terms of a group of chronologically arranged reactions to a series of circumstances. They became deeply interested in those aspects of consciousness which cannot be viewed as a progression of individual and self-existing moments, but which are basically dynamic rather than static in nature and are independent of chronological sequence in a way that events are not. Defining consciousness William James writes: "Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. The significance, the value of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it. Consciousness does not appear to itself chopped in bits, ... It is nothing jointed, it flows ... let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life."

The theory of the continuity of consciousness correspond with Bergson's theory of time. Leon Edel writes in "The Psychological Novel," "Like William James, Bergson taught we are remoulded constantly by experience; that consciousness is a process of endless accretion, so long as mind and sense are functioning, that it is the continuation of an indefinite past in the living present. And out of this comes also the preoccupation with time which is central to psychological novel. The watch measures off the hours with continuing regularity, but consciousness sometimes makes an hour seem like a day or a day like an hour. In the mind past and present merge. So, in setting down in the novel the thoughts as they are passing through the mind of the character, the novelist is catching and recording the present moment and no other."

In the early twentieth century people were disgusted with Victorian superficiality and were turning inward. In England Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf wrote "interior" novels.

Lionel Edel elaborately writes about various aspects of the new technique which may be summed up as the consciousness observance of point of view, the internal monologue, the symbolic representation of life, the control of the reader's vision, the use of 'arbitrary dial', the subjective and autobiographical tendency, the desire to make the novel a poem and to present blocks of consciousness like images in mirror.

We should consider the contribution of Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf to the development of the stream of consciousness technique.

Dorothy Richardson's first novel "Painted Boats" was the first novel written in the stream of consciousness technique. In it she tried to present both the subjective and objective biography of a character, a woman named Miriam Henderson. Miriam's consciousness is the

stage on which the drama of her life enacted. It is the stream of Miriam consciousness that the novelist reproduces without any interference on her part. Richardson's novel is indeed, built round a series of luminous points - what the poet described as 'intensities' - and Miriam Henderson remains most of the time 'the central core.' Painted Roofs is an excellent study of feminine psychology.

James Joyce is one of the greatest novelists of the twentieth century. He is one of the chief exponents of the stream of consciousness technique in English novel. Joyce's first work The Dubliners, a collection of short stories, is based on the slum life of the Dubliners. These stories have individual flavour. A Portrait of The Artist As a Young Man is an autobiographical novel in which the novelist projects himself in the character of Stephen Dedalus. Joyce analyses with great subtlety and cool detachment the spiritual life of the hero. His handling of the sexual problems involves us forthright. In it Joyce reveals his unobtainable power to explore the psychology of his own nature with detachment and scientific curiosity. Ulysses is Joyce's masterpiece. It is a remarkable psychological study of the life and mind of Leopold and Mrs Bloom during a single day. Ulysses has been called "comic epic in which the novelist went deeper and farther than any other novelist in its handling of the interior monologue and stream of consciousness technique."

Virginia Woolf's first two novels The Voyage out and Night and Day are largely traditional. But soon she realised the inadequacy of the traditional novel, and adopted the stream of consciousness technique in Jacob's Room. She deftly uses the device of internal monologue to reveal the consciousness and psychic condition of Jacob. Thus we see that she uses the devices of consciousness in her ^{other} novels as in Mrs. Dalloway, To The Lighthouse, The Waves etc.

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